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GUIDE FOR CONDUCTING A

RECORDS CLEANOUT CAMPAIGN

IN THE METROPOLITAN D.C. AREA

General Services Administration
National Archives and Records Service

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Introduction

The following pages contain suggestions relating to the content, objectives, and operation of a cleanout campaign in the Washington D.C. area, based on the experience of GSA and other agencies.

Files containing more detailed information on prior campaigns may be examined by agency records liaison officers. To do so, they should call the Office of Federal Records Centers, National Archives and Records Service, GSA (Code 13, extension 35185).

What is a Records Cleanout Campaign?

A records cleanout campaign is a concentrated effort over a fixed period of time to transfer from office space and equipment, or to destroy, records not needed in daily agency business. In such a campaign records are:

a. Destroyed immediately in accordance with authorized records control schedules, or general records schedules as adapted by the agency, or

b. Transferred to Federal Records Centers or to agency holding areas.

Files normally identified by a department or agency as non-record materials should also be included in the campaign.

Generally, such a campaign has the following elements:

1. Planning
2. Issuing Directives
3. Training
4. Publicizing
5. Destroying and Transferring Records
6. Reporting

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[illegible] Planning

Planning for a records clearance campaign should be based on the assumption that all elements will be involved. Unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, no office should be exempt. Records officers or others responsible for the campaign should therefore be certain that liaison personnel are designated.

These liaison personnel are the direct representatives of the records officers for the clearout operation. If they do not already function as liaison personnel in the agency records disposal program, they may be:

a. Files supervisors, or

b. Administrative officers, or their assistants.

Designated personnel should have at least a rudimentary knowledge of records disposition policies and procedures. If they do not have that knowledge, they must acquire it in the training programs devised in connection with the records clearance.

During the planning stage of the clearout, at least several meetings should be held with the liaison group to discuss proposed plans and procedures.

These meetings should accomplish the following:

1. A goal should be set.

This goal, which should be expressed as a percentage of agency records to be transferred or destroyed, should be determined with the following in mind:

The percentage of agency records in center-type space or storage areas

The Hoover Commission of 1949 recommended that at least 50% of agency records should be in records centers or agency holding areas. This should be a goal both in the headquarters and the field.

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The ratio of cubic feet of records to the number of employees

This is one of several yardsticks for measuring the effectiveness of any records disposal program. The present Government average of records in office space is just under five cubic feet of records for each civilian employee. For most agencies this figure should be lower.

c. The length of the cleanout should be determined.

This will vary with the size of the department or agency. The experience of some agencies indicates that the cleanout probably should not last more than six weeks nor less than two weeks. Larger agencies, or departments may find that additional time will be required for an effective cleanout campaign. The exact schedule, of course, should be worked out with GSA.

d. The dates of the cleanout should be determined.

The cleanout should be scheduled during a period when it does not conflict with other major agency activities involving large numbers of administrative personnel. It obviously should not be scheduled during periods when many employees are likely to be absent.

e. Plan the steps for the cleanout, including those discussed below.

1. Issuing the Directives

The department or agency directive announcing the cleanup campaign should be signed by the head of the agency or his immediate subordinate, and should be distributed to all concerned. The wording of the directive may vary, but it should contain at least the following elements:

a. Purpose of the records clearout campaign

Government-wide savings in records storage

The cleanout as an aid to good office management and economy

Relation of the cleanout to the continuing records disposition program

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c. Background

- Volume of records in the agency
- Volume of records in center type space
- The moratorium on file cabinets
- Results of previous cleanout campaigns if any

d. Authority

- The Federal Records Act of 1950
- The Records Disposal Act of 1943
- Federal Property Management Regulation 101-11.4

e. Procedures

- Assignment of overall responsibility for the cleanout, covering:
  - Instructions
  - Training
  - Reporting

f. Conclusion

- Expression of personal interest and support for the cleanout

The records officer, or the official responsible for the cleanout campaign, should insure that his liaison personnel in turn issue supplementary directives to their own organizations, if needed.

3. Training

The training program developed in connection with the records cleanout campaign should have two aims:

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- Have agency personnel who will be most heavily involved in the cleanout be familiar with the basic policies and procedures of records disposition and transfer.
- Discuss and clarify the techniques to be used in the cleanout.

The training program, which should not take more than one day, can be presented as a records disposal workshop or as a series of question and answer sessions. In either case, GSA records disposal specialists may be able to participate, if needed.

Trainees can come from one of two levels:

- The liaison personnel, who will in turn train the file clerks and secretaries having immediate charge of agency files.
- The custodians of the files themselves, who will then be expected to apply the cleanout techniques without further instruction.

The training program should be introduced by a discussion of what the agency has done in the past in destroying and transferring records, and how the records cleanout relates to the disposal program.

Here is a list of suggested topics to be covered:

1. Disposal
   - Agency schedules
   - General records schedules
   - GSA Handbook Applying Records Schedules
2. Transfer
   - File breaks
   - Eligibility for transfer
   - GSA Handbook Federal Records Centers
   - Services of the Washington National Records Center
3. Permanent records

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d. Non-record materials

e. File cabinet monetorium

f. Computing records volume

g. Computing accomplishments

h. Reporting

4. Publicizing the Campaign

The records cleanout campaign should be brought to the attention of all personnel in the agency by a variety of devices:

Cartoons: These can graphically illustrate the value of and need for the records cleanout campaign. With imagination and ingenuity, they can be the most influential single medium for publicizing the campaign. Numerous examples are available in the kits on recent campaigns referred to above.

Bulletins: Periodic bulletins and lobby displays, summarizing in a few words the objectives of the campaign can be valuable. These can emphasize that:

a. Fewer unnecessary files mean better administration.

b. Fewer files result in a more attractive office, which is a matter of personal pride.

c. A good cleanout job can reflect credit on the entire agency.

Agency newspapers: If the agency has a newspaper, or "house organ," the drive should be prominently featured in it. The text can be accompanied by pictures showing file cabinets being emptied or showing office conditions "before" and "after."

Press releases: Some larger agencies and departments have announced their campaigns by press releases issued to the commercial news services and to newspapers. In many cases these releases actually appeared in newspapers with both local and

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2. Destroying and Transferring Records

Here are questions and answers pertaining to the major aspects of techniques used in the records cleanout.

a. What records may be destroyed?

Files are destroyed during a cleanout under one of the following authorizations:

- Agency records schedules
- General records schedules prepared and issued by GSA, and adapted by the agency
- Agency standards for the destruction of non-record materials

It should be emphasized that records are to be destroyed only if they are eligible under authorized schedules, and that if there is any doubt the records in question should be transferred rather than risk illegal disposal.

b. What records should be retained?

Although the cleanout campaign emphasizes disposal, recognition and attention should be given to records of permanent value. Agencies for which a records retention plan exists should insure that no archival records described in it are destroyed. They can, of course, be transferred as part of the cleanout campaign. If a records retention plan does not exist, records earmarked as "permanent" or "retain" in agency records control schedules should be transferred.

c. What records should be transferred?

In general, records are eligible for transfer if they are referred to not more than once a month per file drawer. This should not be an inflexible standard. File custodians themselves are the best judges of what should be sent to the records center. They should, however, be asked to justify continued retention in

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d. Can non-paper records be transferred?

Transferred records may include magnetic tape sound recordings, motion picture film, video tape, microfilm, and other non-paper records.

e. How should non-record material be managed?

The records cleanout drive should include both record and non-record material. Little effort should be expended in attempting to distinguish between record and non-record material. Both normally carry retention periods, both occupy file equipment, and both should be counted as part of campaign results. Furthermore, the cleanout should include reference materials in office bookcases and on shelves maintained for local use. Material in agency libraries, or stocks of publications or similar materials in supply rooms, may be included in the campaign but should not be reported in the campaign results.

f. How can file breaks be used in the cleanout?

File breaks, i.e. file cut-offs, can facilitate the transfer of a portion of a large file which cannot be transferred in its entirety. This technique is used mainly for correspondence or subject files, but it can also be applied to closed case or transaction files.

6. Reporting

Reports of accomplishment should contain at least five items of information:

- Volume of records destroyed, in cubic feet
- Volume of records transferred, in cubic feet
- Number of file cabinets released for re-use
- Linear feet of shelving released for re-use
- Square footage of space recovered, if any

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Reports in connection with the records cleanout are the following:

a. "Feeder" reports from liaison personnel to the official responsible for the cleanout campaign. These reports should be uniform in format. An agency-wide form or form letter should be devised and distributed for the purpose.

The frequency of this report depends on the length of the cleanout campaign. If the campaign is to cover less than one month, only a final report should be needed. However, a campaign lasting more than one month should require at least one progress report and, of course, a final report.

b. Summary report from the records officer to senior agency management officials at the end of the cleanout campaign.

c. A summary report to the Assistant Archivist for Federal Records Centers within 30 days after the cleanout campaign.

All agencies should insure that they have the statistics to demonstrate the effectiveness of their campaigns.

Other Benefits

Beyond the immediate objectives, a records cleanout may disclose related areas for paperwork improvements. Potential areas may include:

a. Better controls over records creation, primarily in correspondence, forms, and reports.

b. Improved records maintenance and files classification systems.

c. Improved records schedules, because present schedules are outdated, are too difficult to apply, or do not cover all the records.

d. Improved utilization of filing equipment.

e. Release of filing equipment for re-use or for declaration as excess.

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Remarks:

Ms. Angel has asked for our comments on their proposed NARS announcement of the next Cleanup Campaign - I suggested that their "Guide" be general enough for all Agencies to use without re-editing and reprinting - He agreed - Please review the attached and give me your ideas for our reply -

FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER

FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.	DATE
STAT	9 May 68

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1969

RAY Yes AND JACK- No! 10 Apr 68

Have you seen this info on next Year's cleanup campaign?

Vince,

Called Dr. Angel of NARS, about the RECORDS cleanup campaign.

He said the campaign will be held from Sept 1968 thru May 1969. Each agency will be asked to schedule a month and coordinate the time with GSA. GSA will have help available, if needed, and will supply the trucks to cart the material to the Records Center.

The campaign will be primarily for agencies in the Wash DC area with emphasis on the use of the Records Center [redacted]

Dr. Angel said the campaign will be discussed at the Records Officers meeting in the spring.

STAT

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March 1, 1968

From: Start a Project folder for next year's Records Cleanup Campaign

miles Ray or Jack

hand out.

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